



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 28, 2017

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Erie County Parks and Land Conservancy collaborate to create new natural habitat park along lakeshore

Last spring, a generous landowner donated a beautiful 8-acre forest on a bluff overlooking Lake Erie in Derby to the Western New York Land Conservancy. The Land Conservancy is a non-profit land trust that protects forests, farms, and scenic vistas forever; including places like the Stella Niagara Preserve in Lewiston and The Owens Falls Sanctuary in Aurora.

There is very little natural land like this left along the Lake Erie shoreline. The forest has trees that are more than 100 years old. Many birds find food and shelter in these trees during their long spring and fall migrations. Scattered wetlands provide habitat for frogs, toads, and salamanders. It will be a great place to take a walk, enjoy nature, and marvel at the spectacular sunsets over Lake Erie.

The Land Conservancy has been working with Erie County Parks in recent months to transfer ownership of the Lakeshore Forest to the County and create a unique natural habitat park. The land will be dedicated as parkland, a designation that ensures that the parcel will remain forever as protected and preserved public land.

In order to ensure that more land is protected and stewarded in perpetuity, the Land Conservancy is following a national model by working as an intermediary to acquire land, which is then donated to a governmental agency. Finding partners who can manage the land in perpetuity enable land trusts like the Land Conservancy to achieve a broader scale of conservation across the entire region.

"We are particularly grateful for the team of people that made the protection of this land possible," said Land Conservancy Executive Director Nancy Smith. "We are fortunate to have leaders in Erie County government who recognize the value of transformative places like the Lakeshore Forest and ensure that they are available for future generations. We are also particularly grateful to the landowner who generously donated this spectacular forest for protection in the first place."

"The Erie County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Forestry is uniquely positioned to protect, preserve, and maintain precious natural spaces, and with the help of partners like the Western New York Land Conservancy we are able to extend our efforts even further," said Commissioner Dan Rizzo. "Thanks to the work of the Conservancy, eight beautiful acres on the Lake Erie shoreline will now be preserved in perpetuity for public use and appreciation as parkland. The Parks Department and Land Conservancy enjoy a strong partnership with a shared vision and long-term commitment to leaving a better Erie County for future generations, and land acquisitions such as this, which will now forever remain parkland, are the product of that partnership."

"The opportunity to preserve this acreage for public use not only adds to Erie County's parkland but is also consistent with natural habitat protection initiatives stated in the Initiatives for a Smart Economy," said County Executive Mark Poloncarz. "Our parks are the legacy we leave to our children and grandchildren, and thanks to this partnership with the Land Conservancy, the Lakeshore Forest will now be available in perpetuity for residents to enjoy."

The Western New York Land Conservancy is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York for future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1,700 land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State. Land trusts have protected 40 million acres over the last 20 years. For more information on upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, or the mission of the Western New York Land Conservancy, please call (716) 687-1225 or visit www.wnyc.org.

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